

MEDRx

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DATE OF REVIEW: 7/9/15

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE

The item in dispute is the prospective medical necessity of Epidural steroid injection at L4-5

A DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR EACH PHYSICIAN OR OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WHO REVIEWED THE DECISION

The reviewer is a Medical Doctor who is board certified in Orthopedic Surgery

REVIEW OUTCOME

Upon independent review the reviewer finds that the previous adverse determination/adverse determinations should be:

- ☒ Upheld (Agree)
- ☐ Overturned (Disagree)
- ☐ Partially Overturned (Agree in part/Disagree in part)

The reviewer agrees with the previous adverse determination regarding the Epidural steroid injection L4-5

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:

is a female with low back pain and left leg pain reportedly since an injury on xx/xx/xx. The medical records on 3/10/2015 reveal restricted lumbar range of motion with pain. There is tenderness to palpation but lower extremity reflexes are normal as are heel and toe walking. Straight leg raise test is positive but the side is not given. Sensation is absent in the right leg, with no dermatomal pattern described. Faber test is negative. Right sacroiliac joint tenderness is noted as well. A local injection was given for a diagnosis of sprain and strain of the lumbar region. Medications for pain and muscle relaxation are given. On 4/21/2015 the records indicate the straight leg raise test is positive on the left and left ankle dorsiflexion strength is 4/5, and there is paresthesia over the dorsum of the left foot. Otherwise the exam

is unchanged. MRI reportedly shows disc extrusion at L4-5 but no nerve root impingement is described. An epidural injection is suggested. No change is noted by 6/6/2015.

ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION INCLUDE CLINICAL BASIS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS USED TO SUPPORT THE DECISION.

ODG, in its "Low Back" chapter, allows for epidural steroid injections for radiculopathy that is documented by physical examinations findings and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic imaging. In this case, physical examination findings are suggestive of lumbar radiculopathy but there is no MRI report that corroborates these findings. There is a mention in office note of 4/21/2015 of disc extrusion, but no mention of nerve root impingement that would be a cause of radiculopathy. In addition, there is no formal MRI report in the record set despite this same note suggesting that two MRI exams have been performed, only one of which showed the extrusion suggested.

A DESCRIPTION AND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREENING CRITERIA OR OTHER CLINICAL BASIS USED TO MAKE THE DECISION:

- ☐ ACOEM- AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE UM KNOWLEDGEBASE
- ☐ AHCPR- AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH & QUALITY GUIDELINES
- ☐ DWC- DIVISION OF WORKERS COMPENSATION POLICIES OR GUIDELINES
- ☐ EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN
- ☐ INTERQUAL CRITERIA
- ☒ MEDICAL JUDGEMENT, CLINICAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACCEPTED MEDICAL STANDARDS
- ☐ MERCY CENTER CONSENSUS CONFERENCE GUIDELINES
- ☐ MILLIMAN CARE GUIDELINES
- ☒ ODG- OFFICIAL DISABILITY GUIDELINES & TREATMENT GUIDELINES
- ☐ PRESSLEY REED, THE MEDICAL DISABILITY ADVISOR
- ☐ TEXAS GUIDELINES FOR CHIROPRACTIC QUALITY ASSURANCE & PRACTICE PARAMETERS
- ☐ TEXAS TACADA GUIDELINES
- ☐ TMF SCREENING CRITERIA MANUAL

☐ **PEER REVIEWED NATIONALLY ACCEPTED MEDICAL LITERATURE (PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**

☒ **OTHER EVIDENCE BASED, SCIENTIFICALLY VALID, OUTCOME FOCUSED GUIDELINES (PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**

Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections:

Note: The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, reduction of medication use and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit.

- (1) Radiculopathy (due to herniated nucleus pulposus, but not spinal stenosis) must be documented. Objective findings on examination need to be present. Radiculopathy must be corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing.
- (2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs, muscle relaxants & neuropathic drugs).
- (3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) and injection of contrast for guidance.
- (4) *Diagnostic Phase:* At the time of initial use of an ESI (formally referred to as the “diagnostic phase” as initial injections indicate whether success will be obtained with this treatment intervention), a maximum of one to two injections should be performed. A repeat block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block (< 30% is a standard placebo response). A second block is also not indicated if the first block is accurately placed unless: (a) there is a question of the pain generator; (b) there was possibility of inaccurate placement; or (c) there is evidence of multilevel pathology. In these cases a different level or approach might be proposed. There should be an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections.
- (5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks.
- (6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session.
- (7) *Therapeutic phase:* If after the initial block/blocks are given (see “Diagnostic Phase” above) and found to produce pain relief of at least 50-70% pain relief for at least 6-8 weeks, additional blocks may be supported. This is generally referred to as the “therapeutic phase.” Indications for repeat blocks include acute exacerbation of pain, or new onset of radicular symptoms. The general consensus recommendation is for no more than 4 blocks per region per year. ([CMS, 2004](#)) ([Boswell, 2007](#))
- (8) Repeat injections should be based on continued objective documented pain relief, decreased need for pain medications, and functional response.
- (9) Current research does not support a routine use of a “series-of-three” injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections for the initial phase and rarely more than 2 for therapeutic treatment.
- (10) It is currently not recommended to perform epidural blocks on the same day of treatment as facet blocks or sacroiliac blocks or lumbar sympathetic blocks or trigger point injections as this may lead to improper diagnosis or unnecessary treatment.
- (11) Cervical and lumbar epidural steroid injection should not be performed on the same day. (Doing both injections on the same day could result in an excessive dose of steroids, which can be dangerous, and not worth the risk for a treatment that has no long-term benefit.)